

Report of the 6th meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok, Thailand, 23 – 25 April 2019

The 6th and final meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was held in Bangkok from 23-25 April 2019.

The meeting was opened with remarks from Ms. Gemma Van Halderen, Director of ESCAP Statistics Division, Ms. Letizia Rossano, Director of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM), and on behalf of the Expert Group members, Mr. Rashad Gasimzada, Head of the International Cooperation Division, Ministry of Emergency Situations, Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Expert Group meeting was preceded by the Regional Meeting on Gender Statistics in Climate and Disaster Risk Reduction co-organized by UN-Women and ESCAP on 22 April 2019.

60 experts from 23 Asia and Pacific countries namely Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu and Viet Nam; from international organizations and non-government organizations participated and contributed to the discussions.

Implementation of the Disaster-related Statistics Framework

In the opening session of the meeting, participants were informed that the statistical content of the Disaster-related Statistics Framework had been endorsed by the Committee on Statistics in October 2018 and that the handbook, the main output of the Expert Group's collective work, had started to gain impact in other regions as well, with its inclusion in the report on disaster-related statistics to the 50th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in March, 2019. With the completion of work to develop the Disaster-related Statistics Framework, the new task before the group of experts is to direct collaboration towards the implementation of the framework in the region.

The Expert Group meeting was organized to share experiences between countries and institutions on the implementation of the Disaster-related Statistics Framework and develop recommendations for the following components of Disaster-related Statistics Framework implementation:

- i. Demands and challenges for use of official statistics for informing disaster risk reduction
- ii. Institutional arrangements for disaster-related statistics
- iii. Statistics for disaster risk assessment
- iv. Statistics for post-disaster assessment (impact statistics) and target monitoring
- v. Statistics for long-term integrated sustainable development planning
- vi. Emerging issues and new methodologies
- vii. Capacity development

Current practices and recommended areas for further development were shared in presentations from 27 national and international institutions. Presentations were followed by group discussions and reporting back to synthesize core or common messages for each topic.

Way forward

The network of experts is expected to transition into a Technical Working Group, as recommended to the Committee on Statistics by the Expert Group.¹ This meeting represented a part of a transitional phase for the community of disaster-related statistics experts in Asia and the Pacific, moving from development of methodological guidance in the Disaster-related Statistics Framework towards the implementation of international guidance, capacity development, and pilot studies and further investigations for the Disaster-related Statistics Framework research agenda.

At the national level, institutional strengthening and national coordination featured as one of the core themes of discussions regarding the next steps and the way forward. Experts agreed on priority actions and requirements, with due attention to the national context and roles of institutions:

- i. Strengthen legislation or agreements between agencies to specify roles of institutions regarding data collection and sharing in countries
- ii. Encourage creation of specialized/thematic units within statistics offices for disaster-related statistics
- iii. Strengthen national inter-agency coordination and quality assurance, for example through creation of national technical working groups on disaster-related statistics
- iv. Develop national platforms or coordination mechanisms for data sharing and for reporting international indicators
- v. National mapping of who (which agencies) is producing what (kinds of relevant data sets), following a meeting of contributing agencies to prioritize actions for improving the quality of evidence for disaster risk reduction policies

Another core theme regarding future steps for the Technical Working Group and its participating institutions was the need for making better use of existing data and emerging technologies for improved availability and use of disaster-related statistics for informing disaster risk reduction. The Expert Group agreed to the following principles for increasing the quality and use of existing data sources:

- i. Encourage adoption of new technologies, which requires investment in human resources, equipment - especially for use of geographic information system (GIS), satellite imagery, and new statistical techniques such as machine learning
- ii. Establish and compile national databases of key baseline (e.g. economic, social, environmental) data before the disaster
- iii. Develop and disseminate tools for integration of environmental and hazard assessment methodologies, with an ecosystem perspective
- iv. Use of statistics for evidence-based demonstration of benefits from investment in disaster risk reduction

¹ https://www.unescap.org/commission/74/document/E74_24E.pdf

- v. Support improvement of metadata in national databases
- vi. Countries should strengthen validation of damage and loss data from disasters (e.g. using satellite imagery)

The expert group considered new areas of research and methodological development for disaster-related statistics and discussed a list of topics for further study by the Technical Working Group. A new revised description of topics for further study (Disaster-related Statistics Framework research) will be prepared by the secretariat based on these discussions for posting on the Expert Group website and for further consultation and sharing of experiences electronically. Topics discussed as potential priorities for further research and pilot studies by national institutions are:

- i. Disaster risk reduction expenditure and transfers, including international aid and response (resource inflow) during and after disasters
- ii. Trans-boundary effects of disaster
- iii. Develop common indicators for a gender perspective for disaster-related statistics
- iv. Impact of disasters to mental health (post-disaster trauma)
- v. Displacement of people
- vi. How to integrate data on vulnerable groups into collection or compilation of disaster statistics
- vii. Links with national accounts/environmental accounts, including integration with the ecosystem accounting perspective
- viii. Disaggregation of data (including by sex) and by type of data, e.g. before and after the disaster
- ix. Use of impact statistics for risk assessment
- x. Measurement of indirect impacts
- xi. Accessing data from the private sector
- xii. Integration of operational/administrative data with official statistics

Expert group participants agreed on a common need for investing in statistical capacity development for national institutions and identified a list of priority capacity development themes or topics for which continued regional collaboration could benefit disaster risk reduction across Asia and the Pacific:

- i. Develop guidance for making disaster-related statistics not only accessible but understandable to the public (simplify messages for non-statisticians)
- ii. International training strategy, e.g. the group encourages use of e-learning platforms (e.g. as developed by United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and Asian Disaster Preparedness Center)
- iii. Strengthen technical capacity for mapping, use of GIS and geospatial data, other forms of big data, and for greater use of new statistical techniques like machine learning
- iv. Develop training and build national training capacities, involving the national statistical organizations (NSOs) and national disaster management authorities (NDMAs)
- v. Develop step-by-step guidance on how to collect data and better manage data—especially for post-disaster statistics

- vi. Develop further guidance on using disaster-related statistics for cost-benefit analyses of disaster risk reduction
- vii. Prioritize components of Disaster-related Statistics Framework for capacity-building/training initiatives
- viii. Improve leveraging of different strengths and areas of expertise of different institutions (NSOs, NDMAs, international groups...)

Conclusion

In this final meeting of the Expert Group, there was an acknowledgement and appreciation for the work done by the Expert Group on the DRSF. It was recognized as a useful tool for national statistical offices and disaster management agencies to produce statistics required for national and international reporting. The DRSF, when applied in collaboration with officials in national disaster management offices and statistical offices will generate more relevant, more frequent, coherent and comparable disaster related statistics to make informed decisions.

To transcend from the development of the DRSF to its application for the production of disaster-related statistics, a re-configured regional Thematic Working Group on disaster-related statistics and its draft Terms of Reference were approved by the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics in April 2019. The Thematic Working Group is envisioned as an international network of professionals and experts to support the capacity of member states to implement the basic range of disaster-related statistics that are aligned with national priorities, internationally comparable across countries and coherent with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Among the functions of the Thematic Working Group are: to provide a platform for discussion and sharing of experiences and good practices among countries in the production of official statistics related to disasters; maintain and expand a pool of experts to provide technical support and guidance in the implementation of the DRSF; and to coordinate and exchange advancements from Asia and the Pacific with related global and regional initiatives.

The UN Statistical Commission in its 50th session in March 2019 recognized the DRSF as the starting point for developing a common statistical framework on disaster-related statistics, involving a network across the expert communities to sustain cooperation and coordination for enhancing statistics related to hazardous events and disasters. The DRSF provides an example of a regional effort that can be used as a universally applicable tool of global relevance.
